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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

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S E C R E T MANILA 4580

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E, O, 11652: GDS

TAGS: OREP (MOOSE, RICHARD AND MEISSNER, CHARLES)

SUBJECT: STAFFDEL MOOSE/MEISSNER

DEPARTMENT PASS PAT HOLT FOR COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

1, ALTHOUGH WE HAD PLANNED TO DELAY ENROUTE TO WASHINGTON TO PREPARE FORMAL PRESENTATION FOR NEXT WEEK, WE NOW REGARD SITUATION SAIGON AS SUFFICIENTLY CRITICAL THAT COMMITTEE SHOULD RECEIVE REPORT AT EARLIEST POSSIBLE MOMENT. ACCORDINGLY, WE PLAN TO ARRIVE WASHINGTON SATURDAY, PERHAPS 1100 P.M., IN HOPES THAT WE MAY BRIEF AS MANY MEMBERS AS POSSIBLE.

2, THE CLEAR CONSENSUS OF OPINION IN SAIGON IS THAT THE MILITARY SITUATION IS CRITICAL GIVEN THE REAL POSSIBILITY THAT SAIGON'S DEFENSES COULD COLLAPSE SHOULD THE NORTH VIETNAMESE LAUNCH A COORDINATED ATTACK FROM VARIOUS DIRECTIONS. SUCH A MOVE IS NOW WELL WITHIN THEIR CAPABILITY. WITHIN THE CITY THE FRUSTRATION OF MILITARY AND CIVILIAN LEADERS WITH WHAT THEY CONSIDER TO BE THE DISASTROUS REFUSAL OF THIEU TO STEP ASIDE ADDS TO THE TENSION. THE ORDINARY FOLK OF SAIGON ARE EXTREMELY FEARFUL AND NERVOUS. THE COMBINATION IS HIGHLY VOLATILE.

3, THERE IS A GROWING FEELING HERE THAT THE REALITIES OF THE SITUATION ARE SUCH THAT IT MAY ALREADY BE TOO LATE -- IF INDEED THERE WAS EVER TIME-- TO GET THE MORE THAN FIVE THOUSAND REMAINING AMERICANS OUT OF SAIGON SAFELY -- LET ALONE REMOVE MANY VIETNAMESE FRIENDS. EVEN A STRONG USE OF U.S. FORCE WOULD NOT IMPROVE PROSPECTS FOR A MASS EVACUATION OF AMERICANS AND VIETNAMESE. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS SITUATION IN TERMS OF THE LIMITATIONS WHICH IT PLACES ON U.S. OPTIONS IN THE EVENT OF A NORTH VIETNAMESE ATTACK AND/OR SOUTH VIETNAMESE PANIC ARE, IN OUR VIEW, OF THE UTMOST GRAVITY.

4, WE WILL ADVISE YOU OF OUR PRECISE TRAVEL PLANS LATER BUT AT PRESENT WE PLAN TO LAY OVER IN HONOLULU FRIDAY,

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APRIL 11, BETWEEN NOON AND 6:00 P., HAWAII TIME. WE
WILL CALL YOU FROM THERE, SULLIVAN

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